DATA FROM A COLONY OF VIEILLOT'S BLACK WEAVER, *MELANOPTERYX* (*PLOCEUS*) *NIGERRIMUS* VIEILLOT

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In September 1965 it became necessary to destroy a colony of Black Weavers on the school compound at King's College, Budo, near Kampala. The writer was present and was able to remove approximately half of the nests individually and so obtain a record of their contents and a number of specimens of young for analysis of gut contents. The resulting data throw light on the sex ratio in the colony, clutch size, spacing of hatchings and food of the nestlings.

The total number of nests present was 59 and 30 of these were removed for examination. They represented an entire section of the colony and may be regarded as a representative sample of it.

Number of occupied nests.

In this species the main structure of the nest is built by the male, generally before pair formation, and the female then adds the soft lining of the egg chamber. After a nest has been accepted by a female the male proceeds to build another nest and to attempt to attract another mate. The numbers of incomplete and occupied nests in the sample were as follows:

Nest without lining of egg chamber: ..	9
Nests with lining (complete or not) but no eggs or young:	4
Nests with eggs and/or young:	17

Two of the nests without contents had complete linings and it is *possible* that these had been occupied but vacated after fledglings had flown. However, they appeared to be fresh structures and it seems likely that in fact no vacated nests were present. The writer has evidence (as yet unpublished) to show that in an active colony nests are very often destroyed soon after fledglings have left them. Accordingly it is probable that out of the 30 nests 21 were tenanted by females.

Just before the colony was destroyed an estimate was made of the number of males present and according to this there were 18 in the whole colony. In the half colony one would therefore expect 9—a number exactly equal to the number of nests untenanted by females. The ratio of males to females in the colony was therefore approximately 2:1. However, this does not take into account any females which might have left, having been present at an earlier stage.

Numbers of eggs and young present.

All eggs contained developing embryos. Young varying in age from newly hatched chicks to fledglings ready to fly were present. The contents of nests were as follows:

Number of nests.	*Contents*		
	Eggs	*Unfeathered chicks*	*Feathered chicks*
2	1	0	0
5	2	0	0
3	1	0	1
3	0	1	0
2	0	2	0
2	0	0	1
2	0	0	1

It will be noted that in no case was the clutch larger than 2. (According to Jackson (1938) and Bannerman (1949) the clutch size is usually 2 but occasionally 3.) It is interesting that in three cases there was evidence of long delay between hatchings, since a chick at an advanced stage was present in a nest containing an unhatched egg.

Gut Contents.

Eleven chicks were killed (the twelfth, being capable of flight, was released) and the contents of their gizzards removed for examination. The food was examined microscopically and also tested for the presence of starch by means of iodine. There was no obvious difference in gut contents in the chicks of differing age. In all cases insects made up the greater part of the food, vegetable matter being almost completely absent. There were no recognisable grass seeds (which are believed to form a major component of the adult diet, see Crook (1964), Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1955)). In one case only was there a trace of starch. It was impossible to identify insect species, but several grasshoppers were present. There were also pieces of snail shell in one specimen.

References

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